Greek Killing Revives Welch Mystery

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By Mary Anne Weaver
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ATHENS, Dec. 19—Despite an exhaustive year-long investigation, mobilizing at least eight security services around the world, the assassination in Athens last December of CIA station chief Richard Welch remains a mystery.

No substantial leads have been uncovered and authorities have exhausted most of the clues, which were fragmentary at best.

But fresh impetus has been given to the investigation and new sensitivities have been raised by the assassination last Tuesday of Evanghelos Mallios, a ranking security official of the ousted Greek military government. Police said yesterday that ballistics tests show that the same .45 caliber pistol was used in both assassinations.

During the year since the killing of Welch, crack teams of CIA investigators have come to Athens. So far they have directed or participated in four major inquiries. A number of foreign services have cooperated, including the Cypriots, Turks and, interestingly, the Soviet KGB.

According to authoritative sources, the KGB apparently was eager to show that it was not responsible for Welch's death. It apparently realized that its own agents could become highly vulnerable if warfare broke out between major intelligence services.

For the investigators, there was little to work on from the beginning since the assassination was a highly professional job.

Surrounded by three masked men outside his posh suburban villa as he returned from a Christmas party Dec. 23, Welch, 46, was gunned down with silent precision. Within 60 seconds he lay dead on the pavement. The assassins sped away in a black Fiat without leaving a trace.

After a year of sifting clues, interrogating suspects and trying to unravel motives, the prevailing theory, according to one source close to the investigation, is that a small group of rightist extremists were responsible for the assassination. They could have been Greek, Greek-Cypriot or both.

Their motive was twofold according to the theory: to destabilize Greece's new democratic government and to settle a score with the American agency. The CIA has been accused of betraying rightists in both Cyprus and Greece.

"This was a time," another source added, "when major trials were sending the leadership of the junta (deposed in 1974) to prison for life. Makarios had returned to Cyprus and the idea of *enosis*, "a union of Greece and Cyprus supported by the rightists" was clearly and finally dead. These were guys who, in their right-wing, anti-Communist fanaticism, thought they were implementing the agency's plans. So they expected the CIA to support them. But dictatorships were overturned in both Nicosia and Athens and the CIA never said a word."

"Welce was well known on Cyprus," the source continued. "He served there in the volatile years after independence, from 1960 to 1963. On an island like that you're bound to make enemies, and some of the best guns in the eastern Mediterranean are members of EOKA-B," the Greek Cypriot terrorist group.

Interrogation of scores of Cypriots, both sympathizers and informers of EOKA-B, has unearthed no substantive information relating to the Welch murder. Neither have any of the more than 500 interrogations to date.

Known anarchists, professional gunmen, members of Greece's ultra-right and-left, have all been summoned to security headquarters. Their homes have been raided and in some cases, their offices sacked. Although authorities have uncovered a scattering of small arms arsenals, they have unearthed nothing on the assassination of Welch—despite the offer of $160,000 reward. The car used in the killing of Welch has not been found, and, there is no iron-clad evidence that the assassins were Greek.

Welch's driver and bodyguard Evanghelos Chrisochou insists that one of the assassins shouted "Put up your hands" in Greek. Mrs. Welch, the only other witness, does not agree.

Two previously unknown organizations have claimed responsibility for killing Welch, but neither claim could be verified, and police dismissed both as the work of cranks.

One of the most mystifying aspects of the two assassinations is the surfacing of a little-known, underground organization calling itself the Revolutionary Organization of Nov. 17. Named after a student uprising against the junta on that date in 1973, the organization, through printed statements, has claimed responsibility for killing both Mallios and Welch.

Other than the assassination claims and some minor bomb attacks on American cars, authorities have no information of the allegedly leftist splinter group. They concede that there must be some apparatus for such operations, but, thus far, there is no specific evidence that the "Nov. 17" organization exists.

Experts are examining leaflets strewn near Mallio's body, allegedly by "Nov. 17," and comparing them to statements slipped under the doors of foreign news agencies last December, claiming responsibility for the assassination of Welch.

Philolgists have been called in to testify. The *Avghi*, the newspaper of the Communist Party of the Interior, which follows a nationalist, independent line, commented on the phraseology of the Mallios leaflets. Although they were couched in radical leftist rhetoric, the paper said, there were certain expressions which were out of sync for a Greek leftist.

There are a number of striking similarities between the Welch and Mallios operations, including, according to competent officials, the ultimate objective to destabilize the Greek government.

Informed sources caution that an immediate linkage could be superficial. There are also some outstanding discrepancies, particularly that it now appears, in the case of Mallios, to be the work of a group with a radical, leftist base.

As the Welch investigators wait for the next lead, secruity at the American embassy has been intensified. A 10-foot iron fence surrounds the building, and windows have been replaced with opaque glass. Visitors are checked carefully, and both uniformed and plainclothes policemen mill about the lobby and stand outside on the street.

When ranking embassy officers give a party, there are guards on the street outside the house and inside the grounds.

Chrisochou, 48, is still an embassy driver, although he no longer drives the CIA chief of station's car.

The old residence on Vassilias Frederikas, the home of Welch and at least six other station chiefs over the last 25 years, has not been abandoned. A new, officially undisclosed residence has been found.